

POLITICS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT in Sarawak



Editors

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FACTIONALISM IN IBAN POLITICS

Lucy Sebli Seidelson

INTRODUCTION

Unity has been a long-established issue for the Dayaks in general and the Iban in particular. Nevertheless, despite their differences, the Iban used the opportunity provided by Tunku Abdul Rahman's Malaysia proposal to unite. In October 1962, the first two native political parties to form a political alliance were Parti Pesaka Anak Sarawak (PESAKA) and Sarawak National Party (SNAP) (Sarawak Tribune 23 October 1962, p.2). The alliance was subsequently known as the Sarawak National Alliance¹¹. Its first President was from PESAKA, Temenggong Jugah anak Barieng, its Deputy President was Pengarah Montegrai anak Tungan, while Penghulu Francis Umpau and Stephen Kalong Ningkan were its Chairman and Secretary-General respectively. Stephen Kalong Ningkan, the Secretary-General (of the Sarawak National Alliance) said that:

'Although we are living in different divisions and districts, and quite far from one another, the distance can make little difference...without unity among us we should become utterly down-trodden and without a future' (Sarawak Tribune 23 October 1962, p.2).

Therefore, contrary to popular belief, the Iban did attempt to unite politically even before Sarawak gained its independence in 1963. Iban or Dayak Nationalism had emerged well before 1987, most markedly with the formation of the Sarawak National Alliance. But this alliance ended in 1966, and its failure can be attributed to Ningkan's discrimination against the PESAKA leaders in his government, which, in turn, was related to the underlying regional antagonisms between different Iban groups. It is worth mentioning that it was Ningkan who called for unity among the Iban when he stressed that:

'...we must uphold and maintain its [Sarawak National Alliance's] solidarity in order that it will become a strong foundation of our political emergence...[thus] the spirit of co-operation and good friendship should be secured and maintained' (Sarawak Tribune 23 October 1962, p.2).

Why did Ningkan discriminate against the PESAKA leaders? Apart from his bad temper and the fact that he was a Saribas Iban (this point will be elaborated later), what other factors could have prompted him to turn his back on them? After all, he became the first Chief Minister of Sarawak partly as a result of PESAKA's co-operation. There was a number of significant differences between the two Iban-based parties; firstly, SNAP had no hierarchy of traditional leaders, unlike PESAKA, in which most of the leaders were from the *penghulu*, *pengarah* or *temenggong* ranks; secondly, PESAKA was generally more traditional and conservative in its approach toward politics, whereas most SNAP leaders were much

younger and more modern in outlook, having completed their tertiary education, and having worked in the Shell Oil Company in Brunei; and thirdly, the Iban in SNAP, as a result of their earlier exposure to cash crop economy and to missionary schools were settled permanently and were more affluent. Thus, it was perhaps partly a sense of superiority and arrogance on the part of the Saribas Iban (of SNAP) that hindered unity among them and the Rejang Iban (PESAKA). These extraneous factors could explain why the SNAP leaders were suspicious not only of the Iban from the Rejang Valley but also of the Malays, because the Malay rulers traditionally used to levy high taxes on them.

The Iban from the Rejang Valley, on the other hand, had not suffered the same experience with the Malays, and thus were tolerant towards them (Crisswell 1978, p.138). However, the PESAKA leaders were more cautious towards their Chinese counterparts in general as a result of hostile relationships in the past due to Chinese encroachment on Iban farmlands in the Third Division (Crisswell 1978, p.138). The majority of the Chinese in the Third Division were initially Foochow agricultural colonists whom Charles Brooke had hoped would serve as the nucleus for the growing emergence of a group of settled rice farmers. Unlike the Chinese traders in the Second Division, the Foochow farmers were not dependent on the goodwill of native customers, thus there was no need for them to learn the Iban language, and they often lived separately from the natives. In fact, the Chinese in the Third Division were economically and socially self-sufficient, and did not intermarry with the Iban. The one thing that the 'Foochow agricultural colonists did require was land...competition over land became the source of a number of conflicts between the Iban and Chinese in the Third Division, the most notable of which was the Binatang incident of 1925 in which a number of Foochows were killed by Iban' (Searle 1983, p.64).

This chapter discusses the factors that contributed to factionalism in Iban politics during two different periods of time.

The first part of the discussion looks at the period prior to 1963, while the second part analyzes the period after 1963. The year 1963 was chosen for several reasons, one of which is that, 1963 was the year when Sarawak gained its independence. Moreover, 1963 is politically significant to the Iban community because the formation of the new state had introduced them to the world of modern politics which constituted unfamiliar concepts such as elections, political parties and electoral coalitions.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: BEFORE 1963

Regional Division and Brooke Policies

Although the Iban share broadly the same language, cultural values and *adat* or custom, politically, they are the most divided group in Sarawak. As King (1990, p.123) asserted in his discussion of the marginalisation of the Dayaks in the context of Sarawak's subordinate status in Malaysia that, 'it was the Dayaks and especially the Iban who were politically fragmented'. Sandin (1967, p.xx) also notes that, 'the Iban originally had no term which recognised their indisputable ethnic unity'. The word "Iban", which apparently originates from the Kayan word, *hivan* or wanderer, was first used to describe the Iban in the late nineteenth century, while the term "Sea Dayak" was imposed by James Brooke, the first White Rajah, for administrative purposes (Sandin 1967, p.xix). In this sense, the Iban were "created" and named as a defined ethnic group during the Brooke period. However, this overall ethnic identity and demarcation encapsulated significant and continuing internal divisions.

Leigh (1971, 1974), Searle (1983) and Jayum (1991a) have attributed traditional divisions among the Iban to the riverine or geographical factor. The Iban, in the pre-independence years, identified themselves on the basis of their shared physical space. For example, the Iban from Undup would describe themselves as

kami Undup (the people of Undup) or *kami Skrang* (the people of Skrang) or *sidak Delok* (the people from the Delok), and another frequent term used for self-identification was, and still is, *kami Menoa* (the people of this territory). *Menoa* refers to an entire river basin, or the territory of a single longhouse (Sandin 1967, p.xx; Pringle 1970, p.19; Crisswell 1978, p.9). Freeman (1955, p.31&53) also refers to the Iban as comprising 'riverine-based tribes', or communities along the same river system which usually did not raid or headhunt against each other but instead united against others (see also Pringle 1970, p.92).³

The arrival of James Brooke did not, however, heal the divisions among the Iban. On the contrary, Brooke adopted different policies with regards to the Iban from Saribas, the then Second Division, and those from Rejang, the then Third Division, and Iban from other riverine systems. Brooke was aware of the hostility between the Saribas and Sebuyau Sea Dayaks, and between the Skrang Iban and the Iban of Lingga (also known as Balau Dayaks) and the Undup (Runciman 1960, pp.94-96; Sandin 1967, p.65). In fact, when James Brooke arrived in Sarawak in 1839, the feuds between the various groups of Iban who lived at the mouths of different rivers in Sarawak were raging and he seized this opportunity to pursue his policy to "pacify" the more rebellious Iban of the Saribas and the Skrang (Crisswell 1978, pp.11-12). Sandin notes that, 'the newly arrived James Brooke found that he could easily enlist support of the Sebuyau, Undup and Balau Iban in his warfare against the Saribas and Skrang' (Crisswell 1978, p.71). After he had pacified the Saribas Iban, he then used them against the Rejang Iban. Both Pringle (1970) and Searle (1983) further elaborate that James Brooke used the Saribas Iban to help him "pacify" the so-called "pirates", or the "rebel" Iban from the Rejang river system.

Brooke policies concerning the Iban, or the Sea Dayaks, were based on a "divide and rule" policy aimed at not only playing off Iban against other Iban but also separating Malay communities

from their traditional Iban allies, and at the same time using both the Malay and Iban to counterbalance Chinese economic dominance in Sarawak. Reece (1982, p.4) also maintains that, 'this manipulative formula was at the basis of Brooke rule'. This was done by denying the Malay rivals access to the main reservoir of Sea Dayak's fighting power by establishing forts in Iban country after 1850 (Runciman 1960, p.108; Pringle 1970, p.321; Crisswell 1978, pp.14-15). James Brooke also pardoned the local Malay chiefs who had led the 1857 rebellion against him, by absorbing them into his administration and giving them some influence, rather than condemning them to death. As a result, these Malay chiefs were grateful to Brooke for sparing their lives and 'restoring them to a position of honour and power' (Pringle 1970, p.70). Nonetheless, it is equally important to point out that in spite of the Iban love for travel, war and headhunting, it was the local Malay chiefs who led most of the "piratical activities" (Pringle 1970, pp.49-50,75,90; Crisswell 1978, pp.4-5). While the Malay chiefs received booty and slaves, the Iban would be allowed to take and keep heads for ritual and prestige purposes, although they too received booty and slaves. Nonetheless, it was not the plunder or the captives that primarily motivated the Iban to join Malay-led raids but social and cultural values associated with head-taking.

It was important for Brooke to have the Iban on his side, especially in his attempts to expand his territory. Equally significant was the fact that by separating the Iban and the Malays, Brooke would be in a better position to achieve his ambition for territorial expansion in Sarawak and control of the Malay chiefs. Not only would it weaken the Malays in the process, it was also important to have ambitious, energetic and "natural" warriors like the Iban on his side if he was to win his struggle against the Brunei Sultanate. As Pringle points out:

'...the two groups [Iban and Malay] were intermingled in the lower reaches of all the rivers in Iban country. During the long decades of Brooke

rule, administrative policies were to have the effect of delineating a profound difference between Ibans and Malays' (Pringle 1970, p.59).

Reece also suggests that the "divide and rule policy" succeeded in playing off not only Malays against Iban, but also Iban against Iban. For instance, in 1843, a force of Sebuyau Iban, Sarawak Malays and a few Land Dayaks joined James Brooke and Captain Henry Keppel along with 500 British sailors on an expedition against the Saribas Iban (Runciman 1960, p.76; Pringle 1970, p.74). James Brooke also threatened the Iban of the Padeh and Layar rivers that he would use their old enemy, the Balau Iban, to attack them if they did not behave (Runciman 1960, p.77; Pringle 1970, p.74). The battle of Beting Maro was one example of such action, where 500 Skrang and Saribas Iban were killed by James Brooke and his native allies, who were composed of Malays, and Balau and Sebuyau Iban (Runciman 1960, p.95; Pringle 1970, pp.81-83).

I would like to emphasize the point raised by Pringle (1970, p.62) that 'political loyalties were geographic'. This observation is very important in that it enables us to understand why the Iban were and still are divided politically. The continuous movement of the Iban also contributed to these divisions. Their ongoing search for fertile land as a result of their shifting cultivation had resulted in them coming into contact with other Iban or Dayaks. Fighting for fertile land among the Iban, further exacerbated divisions between those who were defending their territory and those who wished to take it from them. Land is very vital to the Iban for the cultivation of rice, their main food. As well as trading in forest products, they also traded rice for salt and other goods. This explains why the Iban-Malay relationship was relatively close. The Iban depended on Malay traders who could provide them with salt and other items in return for rice, which the Malays needed (Pringle 1970, p.58).

The Iban were also involved in a wide range of trading networks, which brought them into contact with Chinese traders. They exchanged forest products for Chinese ceramic jars, brass gongs and other prestigious goods such as rice and salt, although at the beginning their relationship was limited by the hostility between them as a result of the anti-Brooke Chinese rebellion of 1857. However, their relationships later prospered during Charles Brooke's reign because of Iban involvement in cash crop cultivation which inevitably brought them closer to Chinese traders and shopkeepers. Nonetheless, the relationship between the Iban of the Rejang basin and the Chinese were somewhat different from those in the Second Division. The animosity between the Rejang Iban and the Chinese came as a result of Chinese encroachment onto Iban lands which was attributed to Brooke settlement policy. For example, the Brooke government had encouraged small-scale Chinese farmers to settle in the Third Division, and they needed land for their farming activities (Searle 1983, p.65). Hence Chinese-Iban rivalry was inevitable.

The Brooke policy of divide and rule had other consequences for inter-ethnic relations in Sarawak. James Brooke severed the ties between the Iban and the Malay when he absorbed the Malays into his administration. He also undermined Malay involvement in trade by encouraging Chinese migration to Sarawak. James Brooke seized this opportunity by assuming the position of patron to the Iban, a position which the traditional Malay chiefs had played prior to his arrival (Pringle 1970, pp.71-72; Reece 1982, p.3). Brooke also contemplated using 'Iban fighting strength' to help him 'save his home base, Sarawak Proper', if Brunei decided to attack (Pringle 1970, p.78). James Brooke once remarked:

'If left to my own resources, I [James Brooke] must become the chief of the Dayak...with 200 Dayak *prahus*, [it] will be a formidable force against Brunei itself; and this force may be needed...' (Pringle 1970, p.78).

In an effort to tame the "wild Iban", James Brooke permitted the introduction of Christian missions among them in 1847 (Pringle 1970, p.88). His 'attitude toward the mission was clear... [when] he insisted that no attempt should be made to proselytise among the Moslems [Muslims], fearing that such efforts might upset the delicate and still evolving relationship between himself and the Malay aristocrats' (Pringle 1970, p.88). Initially, James Brooke's attempt to introduce Christianity among the Iban met with little success. Instead, in 1849, Brooke began building forts outside Kuching. Pringle wrote:

'...they [the forts] began to influence social and political alignments in the lower reaches of the Iban rivers. Through them, the Government purposely encouraged a physical separation of Malay and Iban communication in those areas where they were intermingled. This was done because...it was believed that Iban "piracy" was the result of Malay influence. The Brookes were convinced that in order to control the Iban, they would first need to control the Malay' (Pringle 1970, p.90).

The building of forts in Iban territory, especially along the rivers where most of the Iban lived, had a damaging effect on the Iban. Usually, the Iban from the same riverine system, be it upriver or downriver, would never attack each other. However, from 1853, many raids began to occur between upriver and downriver Iban from the same riverine system. Pringle wrote:

'Neither Iban traditional nor British accounts make any mention of similar conflict between downriver and upriver Iban of the Skrang River... Before Brooke rule, the Skrang Iban had all raided together, in alliance with local Malays and with the Saribas people, against Land Dayaks, Melanaus,

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and the Balau and Sebuyau Iban of Banting and the First Division. The presence of Skrang fort and an English officer had changed the pattern of hostilities' (Pringle 1970, p.92).

Thus, divisions among the Iban after the arrival of James Brooke became more profound than ever before. These divisions became even more obvious during the rule of James Brooke's successor, his nephew Charles. Charles's policy in regard to the Iban did not differ very much from that of his uncle except he was more aggressive in his campaigns against the Iban who refused to submit to his authority. In fact, he believed that, 'only Iban could be used to fight Iban or only Dayak can kill Dayak' (Pringle 1970, p.103; Crisswell 1978, p.34). With this in mind, he started his campaigns of pacification by attacking the Iban from the Skrang and Saribas rivers and their tributaries. He used Iban mercenaries from Balau and Sebuyau – the old enemies of the Skrang and Saribas. Pringle (1970, p.109) notes that, 'the Brookes had exploited a fragmented Iban leadership to win the allegiance of an important downriver faction'. In fact, 'the Iban were of central political importance' for both the Brookes and the Malay nobles of Brunei or *pengirans* to control the Iban country in order to expand Brooke territory (Pringle 1970, p.126). Pringle (1970, p.71&197) also maintains that, 'the Dayak tribes were held as private property' first by the Brunei Malays and later by the Brookes to fulfil their needs. Thus, the Iban were passed from one authority to another – from the Brunei Malays and then to the Brookes and more recently to the Malay-Melanau Muslims.

Charles Brooke's education policy further divided Sarawak society when he 'established a Government Lay School which taught the Malay boys in the Malay language and Chinese boys in Mandarin' (Pringle 1970, p.139). His attitude towards education among the Iban or other Dayaks was equivocal; he believed that western education would destroy native cultures. As a result, he did not enrol them in elementary schools. In fact, he left Iban

education to the Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries (Runciman 1960, p.214; Pringle 1970, p.140; Crisswell 1978, p.145). At the same time, he also prohibited Christians of different "sects" from establishing their churches or "teachings" in the same area, which further enhanced these divisions. The Anglican Church was encouraged to establish its church in the Saribas area, whilst Catholics and Methodists were concentrated in the Rejang Division. The Anglican Church had already established missionary schools in Saribas and encouraged the Iban to attend. Due to their earlier exposure to mission schools, Saribas Iban were subsequently employed in the lower ranks of the Brooke administrative service (Searle 1983).

Early exposure to a cash crop economy also made the Saribas Iban more affluent than the Rejang Iban (Searle 1983). For example, coffee planting was introduced to the Saribas Iban by as early as 1889 and as the price of coffee rose, so did their prosperity (Pringle 1970, p.203). When coffee prices plunged, the Iban of Saribas turned to rubber planting, which proved to be of great importance in improving their lives (Pringle 1970, pp.205-206). In contrast to the Saribas Iban, the Balau Dayaks of the lower Batang Lupar river 'were to lag far behind the more enlightened Dayak [Saribas Iban] planters' (Pringle 1970, p.206). Socio-economic differences, according to Searle (1983) and Jayum (1994), further widened the divisions as the generally wealthier Iban from the Saribas tended to look down upon those from the Rejang Division. Why did the Saribas Iban perform better than the Iban from other river systems? Pringle argues for the importance of geographical factors. He wrote:

'The geographic location of Saribas was conducive to permit change and development. This river system is relatively isolated by rugged hills from what were the most chronically disturbed areas of the Second and Third Divisions, the Upper Batang Lupar and Kanowit Rivers. Isolation gave

the people a degree of peace and quiet...when...downriver Iban in many other districts were [still] exposed to intermittent attack by headhunting, and were constantly excited by the presence of tribal enemies...' (Pringle 1970, p.207).

As a result, the Iban from Saribas established permanent settlements and became involved in the cash crop economy unlike the more mobile Iban elsewhere who were frequently involved in raiding and counter-raiding. Socio-economically, the Saribas Iban were also different in that they 'were the first Iban to adopt western dress, to welcome Christianity without necessarily abandoning Iban beliefs, and to try out crops, including coffee and later rubber. They also sought out mission education even before it was available in their own home area'(Pringle 1970, p.193). Although, the Saribas Iban only constituted 15 percent of the total Iban population (based on the 1960 Census Report), many subsequently became prominent in public life.

Another significant point is that 'the Ibans of Saribas were given a head start which they obtained during the reign of Charles Brooke' (Pringle 1970, p.208). A small number of them were absorbed into Charles's administration. As Pringle points out, Charles Brooke administered the Saribas district directly, having spent the first ten years of his career as the local District Officer there during his uncle's rule (Pringle 1970, p.208). All of these developments influenced the political outlook and aspirations of the Saribas Iban, which were different from those of the Rejang. The Iban from Saribas established SNAP in the Second Division, which stressed the importance of Sarawak nationalism and the protection of Iban interests as a whole, while the Iban from Rejang formed PESAKA, which strived to protect Iban customs and culture or *adat*.

Apart from the factors mentioned above, others relating to Iban social organisation and cultural values are also significant to

understanding factionalism in Iban politics. The discussion of Iban social organisation in the next section includes an analysis of the *bilik*-family and *tuai-bilik*, followed by an analysis of Iban leadership at the longhouse and regional level. My discussion of cultural values will include analyses of egalitarianism, individualism and the "belligerent" nature of the Iban as a whole.

Iban Social Organization and Cultural Values

Among the various families or households which make up a longhouse community, there exists a network of cognatic or bilateral kinship ties. But the Iban longhouse is primarily an aggregation of independently owned family apartments (Sutlive 1978, p.48 & 50). Freeman (1970, p.1) observes that, 'although these apartments are joined one to another to produce a longhouse, each of these apartments is an autonomous unit on its own'. The Iban terms for a family sharing the same *bilik* (apartment) are *kami se bilik* (we, the members of a *bilik*), or *sida se bilik* (they of the same *bilik*), and it is the basic unit of Iban social and economic organization (Freeman 1958, p.20; 1970, p.9). Usually, a *bilik*-family is genealogically simple: a man and his wife, their children, together with the grandparents (either of the man or his wife, but not both) (Freeman 1970, pp.11-12; Jensen 1974, pp.31-32). Each member of the *bilik*-family has a distinct and important role that they are expected to play by the *tuai-bilik*. The *tuai-bilik* (head of family) is a senior member of the *bilik*-family and he or she 'assumes the practical leadership of *bilik* affairs and responsibility for farm management' (Jensen 1974, p.53). A *tuai bilik* is a responsible member of the community and has a number of ritual and social obligations to fulfill in addition to being the breadwinner of the *bilik*-family (Jensen 1974, p.54).

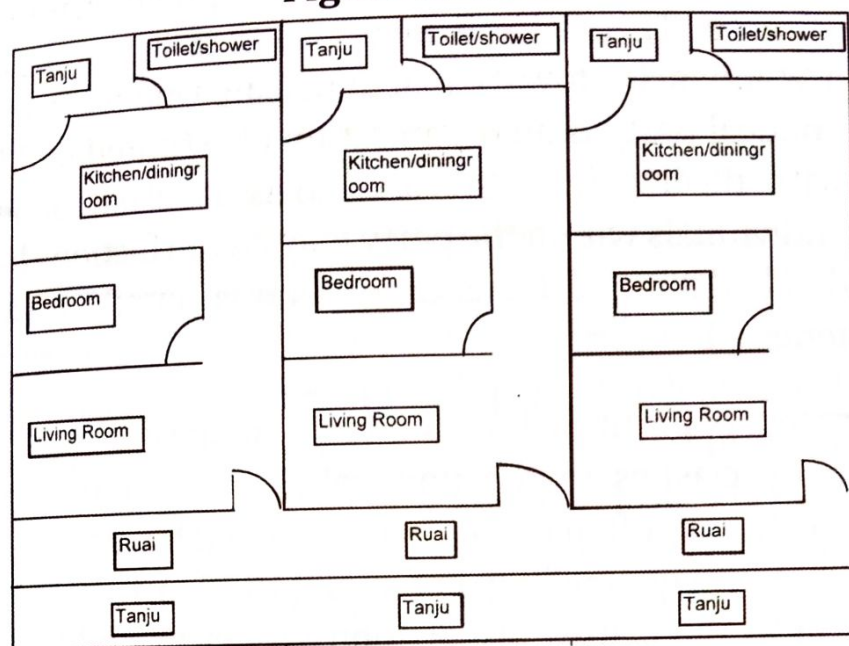
The *bilik*-family owns and occupies one of the separate family apartments of the longhouse; and each traditional longhouse consists of *bilik*, *sadau* (loft), *ruai* (public corridor) and *tanju* (open veranda); while in the modern longhouse, (Freeman 1970,

p.3) the *bilik* usually has a slightly different structure that includes a living room, a kitchen, a toilet or a shower room, a *ruai*, a *tanju* and a *panking* (bedroom) (see figure 5.1). The *bilik*-family possesses both land and property in its own right (Freeman 1958, p.20; Jensen 1974, p.33). Ritually, each *bilik*-family is a discrete unit with its own magical charms (*pengaroh*), its own set of ritual taboos (*pemali*) and its own special kind of sacred paddy (*padi pun*). Because there are no large-scale corporate kin groups among the Iban, the *bilik*-family, therefore, is a very important social unit (Freeman 1970, p.9). In fact, 'each *bilik* is like a sovereign country' (*Bilik siti, baka menoa siti*) which functions as a primary social unit, possessing both land and property on its own (Freeman 1958, p.20 & 22; Sutlive 1978, p.39). Within the *bilik*-family, siblings have equal rights. An adult sibling may claim his or her share of the *bilik* inheritance, and set up a separate domestic unit, which is a common phenomenon in Iban society. Freeman describes this process as "partition", for what happens is the division of a *bilik* into two distinct parts, each part becoming an autonomous unit in its own right (Sutlive 1978, p.46). The Iban refer to this process as *kadiri* which means "to become separate" (Freeman 1958, p.39; 1970, p.41).

The fundamental feature of *kadiri* as described by Freeman is the fact that each part of the *bilik*, after a partition has occurred, becomes a completely independent entity, and not merely a constituent segment of some wider corporate group. Therefore, the *bilik*-family of an Iban community is a discrete unit (Freeman 1970, p.41).

However, there are situations where *bilik* from neighbouring areas attach themselves to one particular longhouse, while others leave to join another. Freeman attributes this high incidence of *bilik* partition to an increase in population. He also concludes that if the family has one child, the partition would never occur, for this individual is then the sole heir (Freeman 1970, p.41). Recently, urbanisation and modernisation have exposed the Iban to modern economic activities. So, educated children who possess steady jobs tend to establish their own *bilik*-family in urban or suburban areas by a process of partition.

Figure 5.1: Bilik



Plan 3A. Plan of an Iban Modern Longhouse (Rumah Albert Tegap, Sungai Batukar, Oya, Sibuh)

Source: Freeman (1970, p.41)

Why partition? All the members of a *bilik* work together as a team in economic activities — they cooperate to form a single producing and consuming unit. This system of common ownership, production and consumption by the *bilik*-family works satisfactorily enough as long as the *bilik*-family remains restricted in numbers (Freeman 1970, p.44). Within the *bilik*-family, siblings are equals, having the same rights and the same obligations, and as such they are joined by strong bonds of solidarity. But when, in due course, these siblings marry, and children are born, these results in the intrusion of new and rival loyalties. The *bilik*-family is no longer a simple group, for it now contains within its boundaries two different elementary families.

Freeman (1970, p.44) raises the question of whether these two families can remain merged as a corporate unit, whereby a man would recognise as equal the claims of his own family and those of his sibling's family. For the great majority of cases, Freeman argues that such a situation is not possible (*ibid*). Iban parents are primarily concerned with their own children and the well-being of their own immediate family; and when two elementary families emerge within

the confines of the same *bilik*, there is a strong tendency for their interests to diverge. This pattern may also cast light on political behaviour and tendencies towards factionalism. One has to bear in mind that a political party is an organisation constituted of different individuals with diverse interests and goals. A clash of interest between the individuals within the party may create factions because of strong individualism and focus on one's own family, or at least one's own clients.

The process of partition is prompted by many different factors, from personality clashes to the unequal sharing of the fruits of cooperative work. Very often partition is preceded by disagreements which culminate into quarrelling. Freeman (1970, p.45) also argues that in relation to the causes of partition within the *bilik*-family, it is the conjugal bond which is the strongest and most decisive, and eventually causes the *bilik*-family to subdivide. The divergence or conflict of interest between the families of siblings is a dominant factor in the process of *bilik* partition (Freeman 1970, p.46; Sutlive 1978, pp. 46-47).

The *bilik*-family also functions as an economic unit. Besides acting as a property-owning unit, it is an institution, which helps foster cooperative as well as competitive values among members of different *bilik*-families. This is important in further demonstrating that Iban have a natural tendency to both compete and cooperate beyond the *bilik*-family in order to realize their full potential in any given task. On the one hand, this competitiveness could, if it is practised to the extreme, further divide or destroy the harmonious relationship between the *bilik*-family members in the longhouse. Competition is also associated with the terms *dengki* (envy) or *berpekit* (competing in terms of lavishly exhibiting one's material resources or one's social status). The institution of *bejalai* also originated from Iban competitiveness. It entails a young man travelling to foreign places to seek fortune and experiences, or, in the modern context, moving away for work and education, as well as seeking alliance with other parties of higher social or economic status than his own.

In addition, Iban genealogy, under which 'any one of innumerable lines of ancestors could be traced through oral genealogies, memorised by recognised experts, was exploited or contracted, in order to establish a desired relationship' (Searle 1983, p.54). Hence, 'the almost limitless nature of the Iban kinship system', that 'permitted a diversity of relationships' which could be easily broken and established, as needs and opportunities, or political circumstance changed, has also contributed to factionalism in Iban politics (ibid). Searle (1983, p.54) further asserts, 'activation and deactivation of an extensive, almost limitless system of kin-ties, thus further encouraged the political mobility of the Iban electorate as individuals and longhouses sought to attach themselves to whichever parties or politicians promised the best prospect of rewards'.

Iban Leadership at the Longhouse and Regional Levels

The Iban had no hereditary leadership or institutions of chieftain in the pre-Brooke era. Their leadership patterns are very flexible, in the sense that anyone can become a leader if he or she has the ability to command great support or attract a significant number of supporters and earn their respect. This is best illustrated by the statements below:

'If you are a good *tuai kayau* (war leader), a group will follow you, but if one day you collapse and you are no longer a good leader, they will [be] gone and disappear' (Masing 20 April 2002).

The term *tuai rumah*, as well as *penghulu*, *temenggong* and *pemancha* (which are Brunei Malay terms for native leaders), were formalized after the arrival of James Brooke as part of his efforts to standardize the Sarawak administrative system. However, this did not improve the Iban leadership structure since these terms were imposed upon them, and created for them, by an external authority. In fact, Masing pointed out that:

'Whoever wanted [*sic*] to be a leader, they must earn it. To unite the Iban in Sarawak, you've got to have a leader who deserves their loyalty. So you cannot force leader[ship] into the Iban society. You've got to earn your leadership. This is because they do not have [an] inherited structured leadership' (Masing 20 April 2002).

In former times, there was no formal centralised political authority among the Iban, and despite the existence of the *tuai rumah* and his authority within the longhouse, such authority was circumscribed. In Iban society, which is based on the *bilik*-family and cognatic kinship, there are no large scale unilineal kin groups, such as lineages or clans, and where there are no corporate groups of this kind, the authority system tends to be rudimentary in character (Freeman 1970, p.111).

The office of *tuai rumah* is not a hereditary one. Ideally, a *tuai rumah* should have a sound knowledge of *adat*, impartiality, good powers of judgement in handling disputes, and an ability to argue and debate. On the other hand, it is also a common practice among the longhouse community to appoint or elect the owner of the land on which the longhouse is erected to the position of *tuai-rumah*. Freeman also says that:

'The Iban have a great admiration for a man who talks fluently and well...there are no specific attitudes of deference or respect, other than what he is able to command by virtue of his own personal prowess and prestige' (Freeman 1970, pp.111-113).

However, under Iban *adat*, a *tuai rumah* has no authority to command other members of the community, nor are they, in any marked sense, his personal subordinates (Freeman 1958, p.18; Freeman 1970, p.113; Jayum 1994, p.46). His position

is dependent on the continued goodwill and approval of his *anembiak* (followers). This is best illustrated by Freeman, when he states that:

‘...if he be partial in his dealings or judgements in executing jurisdiction within his village (i.e. long-house), he forfeits his fame, and his followers leave him gradually’ (Freeman 1970, p.113).

If a chief ceases to have followers, he ceases to govern a village. Under Iban *adat* (custom), it is ‘possible for a *tuai rumah*, whose behaviour meets with general disapproval to be removed from office simply by transference of recognition’ (Freeman 1970, p.114). The true nature of a *tuai rumah*’s role – political, economic and ritual – is very limited in terms of his authority, but he does have one important function: he is, within his community, the custodian of *adat*, its juridical warden and principal arbiter (Freeman 1970, p.114; Jayum 1994, pp.46-47). For the Iban, the main duty of a *tuai rumah* is to watch over the conduct of his *anembiak*, and to safeguard, and administer, the customary law (Freeman 1970, p.115). Although his jurisdiction is limited only to his village, he is, however, responsible in resolving disputes which occur within his longhouse community, and may impose fines of up to \$32 (Guidelines to Iban Adat 2000). He also presides and maintains order over the court (which is usually an area outside of his *bilik* or his *ruai*, also known as *ruai tuai rumah*) which is attended by all parties involved in a dispute (Jensen 1974, p.25).

Today, the *tuai rumah* is looked upon as an intermediary between his longhouse and the government. The government accepts him as the representative of his community, and often he is responsible for the implementation of its policies. Similar to the office of *penghulu*, the succession to the office of *tuai-rumah* is through the eldest son or son-in-law, who shares the same *bilik*-family. However, if no suitable candidates are found, the *anembiak* are likely to seek another candidate from another *bilik*-family who commands the same respect and support from the longhouse community.

Penghulu, in Iban, literally means 'one who leads' and Jensen (1974, p.23) maintains that 'in the traditional Iban context there was no area leader, and the title was used only for those who led head-hunting expeditions (or *ngayau* and usually he was known as *tuai kayau*) or mass migrations (*pindah*)'. The office of *penghulu* was introduced and imposed by the Brooke and has since become part of Iban administration (Jensen 1974, p.23; Jayum 1994, p.45). The *penghulu* is an arbiter in customary law cases between longhouses and as a first court of appeal when the verdict of a *tuai-rumah* is in dispute (Jensen 1974, p.23; Sutlive 1978, p.145). He deals with more serious offences and possesses the power to impose fines of up to \$66 (The Guidelines to Iban Adat 2000). In other words, the *penghulu* is a salaried office.

During the Brooke period, the office of *penghulu* was for life. However, today *penghulu* are appointed for a period of five years on the basis of a local election. Although the office is not hereditary, it is a common practice for the *penghulu* to be succeeded by his son or immediate relative. However, this practice by no means suggests that there is an institution of hereditary chieftainship in Iban society. This practice of succession only occurs when the government is unable to find a suitable candidate. It was, and is, a common belief that the son or son-in-law or another male relative of a retiring *penghulu* is likely to possess 'profound knowledge of customary law and precedent, respected judgment and wide acquaintance with the area administered' when compared to other persons (Jensen 1974, p.24). On the other hand, if the retiring *penghulu* has lost public respect, another suitable candidate from the area will be chosen to succeed the unpopular *penghulu*. Usually, another rival leader from the area will replace him.

Currently, the *penghulu* has jurisdiction over an area known as *pegai*, which covers an area of more than 10 longhouses. Jensen (1974, p.24) maintains that 'demarcation of a *pegai* [was] dictated

partly by traditional groupings, partly by geography, and partly by the relative ease or difficulty of communication'. For example, Penghulu Saging (the current *penghulu*) of Siong has been in charge of two areas called *Pasai-Siong* and *Pasai-Bon* (traditional riverine system comprising two rivers which are tributaries of the Rejang River), which constitute more than 30 longhouses. Although Penghulu Saging has been in office for 10 years, it does not mean that he will be succeeded by his son or son-in-law. In fact, Penghulu Saging's late father was a *tuai-rumah* and Penghulu Saging himself was a *tuai-rumah* prior to his election to the *penghulu's* office. Hence, it is rather difficult to predict who will be the next leader.

The lack of leadership institutions, does contribute to factionalism in Iban politics, and to more fluid alliances. In contrast to the Iban, the Melanau, Kenyah and the Kayan, have had a well established hereditary leadership structure, under which a leader is chosen in accordance with his position or class in the community. An important question remains, why did the present Iban support leaders from other ethnic groups and not their own? This question is of great importance because this pattern of political behaviour has become synonymous with post-independence Iban politics. I will attempt to address this question in the following discussion on Iban egalitarianism, individualism and "belligerence".

Egalitarianism, Individualism and Belligerence

I use the word "belligerence" throughout this section in preference to the word "aggression" because almost all Iban politicians with whom I have talked to used the word to describe Iban confrontational behaviour. Freeman (1955, 1958, 1970), Sandin (1967), Sutlive (1978), Crisswell (1978), Searle (1983), and Jayum (1991a, 1994) have described Iban society as egalitarian, with an emphasis upon individualism. In a traditional classless society, individualism often takes precedence in politics, and Iban

leaders have suggested that in modern politics, "free thinking" among the Iban has made it quite difficult for them to unite. During one of my interviews, James Masing said that:

'In politics, it might be a curse [in the sense] that they [Iban] are free thinkers. They can choose any political parties they want. From [the] political angle, it is a real curse and a real frustration, I can tell you' (Masing 20 April 2002).

Iban leaders have argued that there is a positive side to "free thinking" in the sense that an egalitarian nature makes it more difficult for other ethnic groups to indoctrinate the Iban with certain ideas (Masing 20 April 2002). Factors such as poverty, lack of education, individualism and egalitarianism will also be considered in my attempt to explain why the Iban are members of all political parties which open their doors to them. Despite this, rural voting patterns are more consistent, in the sense that rural voters tend to be more loyal to one particular party than the urban electorate. Here, factors such as poverty and lack of education play a central role. According to some of the Iban leaders whom I interviewed, the rural voters' lower standard of living and lack of education mean that they do not have high expectations of their leaders (Entulu 2001 & 2002) compared to their urban counterparts whose living and educational standards are better.

It is sufficient to say at this point that Iban society, despite its lack of political institutions, has shown great respect toward its leaders. This is best illustrated in the words of Freeman when he said that:

'...the Iban people have a great admiration for a man who...is able to command by virtue of his own personal prowess and prestige' (Freeman 1970, pp.111-113).

Personal prowess and prestige are two important characteristics required of any Iban leader. Any individual who aspires to leadership has to possess these characteristics. A leader has to prove his ability either through his personal achievements, bravery, or prestige before he can convince his people or gain their support and respect. Prior to the arrival of James Brooke, this personal prowess or prestige would include leading a war party into battle and leading a migration (*pindah*). For example, Penghulu Munan anak Minggat (a powerful war leader from Kalaka or Krian, who was wealthy and laden with prestige won in battle) was one of the Iban leaders during Charles Brooke's rule, who had gained popularity among the Saribas Iban and later the lower Rejang by successfully leading them into battle. His personal prowess and prestige as a *tuai-kayau* continued to increase when he led the Rajah's war expeditions against other natives. Even after his brief imprisonment, he still managed to command large support from the Iban from his river system to follow him in his migration to the lower Rejang. In fact, Charles Brooke was so impressed by his unique status as a leader that he conferred on him a special title, Penghulu Dalam, and often took his side when arguments arose between Munan and the senior Brooke officer, D.J.S Bailey (Pringle 1970, pp.180-189).

Despite the argument that the Iban lacked traditional political institutions, it is clear that they did have influential leaders who possessed individual prowess (Freeman 1970; Pringle 1970; Jayum 1994). The emergence of these leaders was facilitated by the Brooke Rajahs, who sought out influential individuals and created special positions for them. However, unlike the Malay, these titles or positions were not hereditary. Thus, before any individual Iban could become a leader, he had to prove to his community that he had all the necessary qualities, and continued to do so.

Searle (1983, p.50) also argues that despite the rapid change in economic conditions, traditional values, especially the stress upon egalitarianism and *ad hoc* leadership, still played a significant

role in Iban political attitudes and life during the 1970s. He further elaborates that:

'...prior to 1974, Iban "political institutions" and "values" at long house level were still strongly affected by their former economic bases which were characterized by continual and aggressive migration and expansion...as an essentially migratory society, Iban had little need for institutions or hierarchy.... Iban society was therefore characterized by its egalitarian nature and a fluidity of authority which related to the groups' needs, and the ability of individuals to fulfill particular needs at particular times. It was thus a society that did not support permanent leaders' (Searle 1983, p.52).

Therefore, and supporting Searle's observation, I conclude that the absence of great leaders, lack of strong political institutions above the family level and manipulation of the extensive system of kin-ties for personal and political ends, amongst other factors, do explain the continued existence of factionalism in Iban politics.

The Iban's belligerent nature has also influenced their approach toward politics. Described as "macho politics" by Iban leaders, it makes the Iban very transparent in their political life. Masing explained Iban "macho politics" as follows:

'For the Iban, you'll not appear or seem to have done anything if you do not say it out [*sic*]. Even before an Iban does something, he'll tell [other] people what he is going to do....In politics, sometimes, you do not say what you want to do. You do not create a very macho image. Politics has changed from the 60s where you used to use your heart in politics, now you use your head [because] if you use your

heart, you do not think carefully and tend to act irrationally....at the same time, when the Iban get together, they tend to discuss how and when can we [Iban] take over the leadership instead of solving their social, economic and political predicaments' (Masing 20 April 2002).

Their belligerent or confrontational behaviour and their egalitarianism, combined with their "macho" approach toward politics have to some extent resulted in their peripheral status or marginality in Sarawak and their tendency to division. This is because those who are in power, especially the non-Iban, feel reluctant to help the Iban develop. As Masing pointed out:

'Why should I [those in power] give you [Iban] the resources, if you are going to use it (sic) to fight me?' (Masing 20 April 2002).

In addition to this particular approach toward politics, it has been argued that this confrontational attitude, whether directed at themselves or other ethnic groups, has also contributed to factionalism. By "confrontational", I mean, their frankness, or openness in expressing their opinions or objections. In Malaysian politics today, a confrontational approach tends not to benefit the Iban in their efforts to take an active role in their own political development. This is best illustrated by the statement below:

'People [will] have to learn to trust us, not only at the state but also at the federal level. Malaysian politics are (is) easier and not complicated [to interpret] because you'll know who will be in power and who will always be in power, and there is nothing you can do [about it]. We are in Malaysia, then, you have to work along [those] lines to get something out of it' (Masing 20 April 2002).

POST-1963: CAUSES OF FACTIONALISM

Parochialism, or Geographical Factor

It has been suggested that a "provincial way of thinking" has continued to contribute to factionalism in Iban politics. According to some Iban politicians (Masing 20 April 2002; Tajem April-September 2001), provincial thinking still plays a decisive role in dividing the Iban politically, despite the progress made in terms of infrastructure, transport and communications throughout the state, their early and temporary unity, and their identity as a named ethnic group. The fact that the Iban are now more open to the outside world can be viewed as a positive development in terms of helping to mitigate provincial thinking among the interior communities. However, this exposure can also pose a threat to Iban solidarity because other political groups with vested interests are given the opportunity to manipulate them politically. Masing noted that:

'Because of these differences in thinking and in our feelings and depending on which region you are [coming] from, it is very easy for another political party to come in and pick you up [recruit you]' (Masing, 20 April 2002).

Although development has opened Iban longhouse communities to the wider world, "provincial thinking" among Iban voters still persists due to their relative lack of education in the rural constituencies and a "traditional mentality" which still exists among the illiterate. This lack of education, coupled with other factors, such as poverty, the "politics of development" strategy used by the state government and, more significantly, the relative political inexperience of the Iban have made it more difficult to erase provincialism.

This provincial thinking still exists today. For example, if the President of the party (i.e., Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS)) is from Rejang river basin, the Deputy must be from the Second Division. This is because Iban leaders from different regions tend to look after the interests of their own people. This was demonstrated during the PBDS leadership crisis, which was contested by Tajem from the Second Division, Salang from the Third Division and Masing from the Seventh Division. In addition, Jayum (1990, p.154) argues that Iban political representatives are responsible for the economic underdevelopment of the Iban community in general. His worry has been that Iban ministers are primarily concerned with development in their own respective areas rather than look beyond their constituency boundaries to encompass the entire Iban community in political and economic development planning.

Government Policies

What is the “politics of development” (POD)? To what extent does it play a role in perpetuating Iban factionalism and how does it assist the state government, which is dominated by the minority Malay-Melanau group, in perpetuating factionalism in Iban politics? Bearing these questions in mind, the following discussion will attempt to analyse the government’s role, through its POD strategy, in undermining political unity among the Iban.

According to Taib Mahmud, the POD was introduced to tackle the problem of ‘the politics of false promises’ or unethical political practices arising from the socio-cultural style of Sarawak politics during the 1980s, especially during the former Chief Minister Tun Abdul Rahman Yakub’s administration (Loh 1997, p.58). Taib Mahmud defined his policy as follows:

“The POD is a total commitment to development by using the power of politics to make sure that we achieve our development objectives. In

other words, we put development objectives as paramount in our political actions. If at any time or another, our political interest is in conflict with the development objectives, the former should by all means give way to the development objectives in as far as politics allows us to do so. In other words, our politics must be subservient to the demands of development, and that means, we who are the leaders, whether at the top or grassroots level, must be aware of our vital role as the representatives of the people" (Jitab & Ritchie 1991, p.38).

Jitab and Ritchie have proposed that Taib Mahmud would not show favouritism in his quest for development in that he emphasised fairness:

'...to be fair to all races is not only an ideal but the only way Sarawak can be assured of a good future; anything else would destroy it' (Jitab & Ritchie 1991, p.39).

In his political rhetoric, Taib Mahmud stressed the importance of equitable treatment in implementing development projects regardless of ethnic group and urban and rural divisions. In short, every *rakyat* (citizen), regardless of ethnicity or religious, historical or cultural background should benefit from the development projects introduced by the government (Jitab & Ritchie 1991). Alas, as has been pointed out by Aeria (1997), Taib Mahmud's POD has failed to fulfil the aspirations or hopes of the majority, especially the Dayaks, most of whom are rural-dwellers. It has remained principally rhetoric. Development projects have been concentrated in the urban areas, and have indirectly discriminated against the rural areas and the Dayaks as a whole. Table 5.1 outlines the main ethnic divisions in 1991 in Sarawak, and indicates that more than 80 percent of the total Iban population were located in rural areas.

Table 5.1: Population by Ethnic Group and Residence, Sarawak, 1991

| Ethnic Groups | Urban | Rural | Total |
|------------------|--------|--------|---------|
| Bumiputera | 150629 | 199941 | 350570 |
| Malay | 86769 | 396699 | 483468 |
| Iban | 25777 | 109818 | 135595 |
| Bidayuhs | 26747 | 66974 | 93721 |
| Melanaus | 13906 | 86182 | 100088 |
| Other Bumiputera | 303828 | 859614 | 1163442 |
| Total Bumiputera | 299625 | 147900 | 447525 |
| Chinese | 6439 | 8193 | 14632 |
| Others | | | |

Source: Sarawak (1991)

It was no surprise during the 2001 elections, the Iban were split into many camps over the distribution of money for development and type of development projects. Those in opposition do not get development projects until they pledge their support to the government. Many political observers have attributed the support of the Iban for any political party in exchange for material rewards, money or development projects to their short-sightedness and lack of understanding of the importance of the electoral process. Masing also argues that because the Iban are scattered throughout Sarawak, it is easier for other ethnic groups to "pick" them off and divide them, unlike the Chinese or the Malay whose communities are more closely clustered.

However, the main reason behind the formulation of Taib Mahmud's POD was to distinguish his administration symbolically and theoretically from that of his uncle, Tun Abdul Rahman, which was heavily dependent on development patronage and the distribution of electoral largesse to parties, business cronies and loyal followers. However, in practice, Taib Mahmud's administration has been no different from that of his uncle. Aeria (1997, p.59) notes that the distribution of development patronage is done through the government's economic development programme, either through timber concessions, other commercial services, or the awarding of government contracts to its clients. Despite Taib

Mahmud's attempts to distinguish his administration from his uncle's, he failed to 'live up to his own vision of the POD during the 1996 state elections' (ibid). Ethnicity also plays a significant role in determining who is going to get what and how much. Masing stated:

'It cannot be denied, there are instances of bias, (*sic*) in which ethnicity has been used as one of [the] criteria for distribution of resources although it is slowly declining' (20 April 2002).

From my personal observations of the 2001 state election, most of the rural electorate contended that they had been "forced" to vote for the candidates put up by the government for fear of being discriminated against in terms of development projects. Evidence suggests that where the opposition won, the constituency was neglected for the next couple of years as "a punishment" (Masing 20 April 2002; Tajem 2001 & 2002; Entulu 2001 & 2002) for betraying or for not showing their appreciation towards the government. This is best-illustrated by the attitude of the late Dublin Unting Ingkot, who was then an Assistant Minister of Urban and Social Development, as follows:

'If they [Iban voters] do not support me during the election, I will leave them alone for a while and will not give them any development projects or funds and I will see if they can survive without supporting me. I don't want to see them suffer, but I have no choice. I do not want them to support me as a person but support the government and since I am representing the government, they will have to support me' (Ingkot 21 April 2002).

Therefore, a significant number of rural voters, most of whom are Dayaks, found themselves in the dilemma of having to choose between the government candidate and their preferred choice of candidate which would mean risking being neglected

by the government. This is apparent in the state seat of Ngemah in Kanowit, and Balingian and Stapang in Sibu constituencies respectively. This is clearly illustrated by Jayum when he argues that:

'...development of the rural communities is another important concern facing the *rakyat* (ordinary people) in the rural constituencies, particularly those who have voted for the opposition...development will not be stopped in all constituencies which voted for the opposition, however, the development areas will be selected and earmarked before development projects are given out' (Jayum 1991, p.154).

Nevertheless, there is another argument that suggests the Iban are short-sighted politically and economically in determining their future. This short-sightedness, combined with poverty, helps explain why they tend to be satisfied with small development projects, such as the supply of zinc roofing, a tarmac road or fresh water fish and fertilizer. As Masing pointed out:

'While I was in [the] opposition, I went all over Sarawak to campaign for our [PBDS] political cause but in the end, the *Tuai Rumah* said, *meri aku atap laban aku nadai atap ditu* [give me some 'atap' roof because I do not have any]. In the end, people who can deliver the goods [development projects] will get the support. It is as simple as that. Furthermore, in a society that is semi-illiterate and poor, it is very difficult for them [the Iban] to think 10-15 years ahead' (Masing 20 April 2002).

However, Datuk Amar Dunstan Endawie suggests otherwise, stating that the POD is nothing more than an economic instrument formulated to control the political advancement and economic progress of certain groups. Among these groups are the Iban politicians whom

he accused of protecting their interests before their own community. In accordance with this view, Loh (1997, p.9) also notes that defections by the opposition or the independents to the Barisan Nasional (BN) were also the result of the need to facilitate development projects for the people in their constituencies. For example, a year after the 1987 election, eight elected state assemblymen from PBDS defected to BN3 for fear of being alienated by the government.

Mason (1995, p.41) observes that the constituencies which voted for the opposition would not be allocated development funds, worth some RM350,000 per constituency annually from the state government. Taib Mahmud's administration went even further by removing the community leaders who had supported the Kumpulan Maju (comprising PBDS, Parti Persatuan Rakyat Malaysia Sarawak (PERMAS) and Democratic Action Party (DAP) and led by Tun Abdul Rahman) and replacing them with those who were pro-BN3. Inevitably, these practices also affected the rural Iban and resulted in the breaking-up and division of longhouses in the rural areas. Subsequently, pressure from the federal BN and the fear that their rural supporters would be further discriminated by the ruling government induced the PBDS to rejoin the state BN immediately after the 1991 state election (Mason 1995, p.49).

Re-delineation of Electoral Boundaries

The re-delineation of electoral boundaries has also had a significant impact on Iban political solidarity. Not only has it resulted in the increasing political marginalisation of the Iban but, more dangerously, it has been done in such a way that it further enhances the divisions between various ethnic groups. Before I proceed with a discussion of this, I will explain what the re-delineation exercise entails and the factors involved in influencing the process of re-delineation.

Sarawak has gone through four re-delineation exercises since it achieved independence. The first was done in 1968, when 24 parliamentary seats and 48 state seats were allocated for the state of Sarawak. The second was carried out in 1977, with no changes in regard to the number of parliamentary and state seats, but there were boundary changes. Then, due to rapid economic development and the increased number of eligible voters from 1977, the Election Commission (EC) felt that a third re-delineation exercise was needed in 1987. In this re-delineation, Sarawak's parliamentary seats were increased from 24 to 27 and its state seats from 48 to 56 (Election Commission 1996, p.2). Finally, on 30 October 1995, the state legislative assembly agreed to add six more state seats which brought the total to 62, and increased its parliamentary seats from 27 to 28; this arrangement came into being in the 1999 general election and 2001 state election. The re-delineation exercise usually takes place on average every 8 years and the official justification is to ensure that all Malaysian citizens are given a chance to practice their voting rights in a systematic, fair and democratic way and to ensure fair political representation (Election Commission 1996, p.10). But in reality, their (the Malay-Melanau led government) purpose has been to redefine electoral boundaries along ethnic lines in order to consolidate Malay-Melanau votes, and help to bolster the Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) and insulate it against Dayak attempts to dislodge it from the state leadership (Lim 2002, p.134).

The re-delineation exercises created a greater number of Malay majority seats at the expense of other ethnic majority seats. It also led to a constituency size and voter ratios that could not be justified by considerations of rural weightage or the actual demography of the constituency. For example, in Kuching, the state seat of Padungan has twice the number of voters as compared to the state seat of Satok; the latter is just three kilometres from the former, yet Satok was created and became a Malay majority constituency.

There are several indicators used by the EC to determine the allocation and the number of electoral seats in Sarawak: (1) the geography and topography of the area, (2) the level of development, (3) the demography and the population density, (4) basic amenities, such as communication and transportation, (5) the state government's ability to cover the cost of increasing the number of state seats, and (6) other principles mentioned in Schedule Thirteen of the Federal Constitution which have to be taken into consideration when this exercise takes place (Election Commission 1996, p. 6). However, the most crucial and controversial factor which has been raised by the opposition is the "weightage" for rural constituencies. The value of votes in the rural areas compared to the urban is 3 to 1. This is particularly important for Sarawak because of its vast rural areas and its topography, which makes communication and transportation difficult. Despite the EC's argument that it would try to minimise the use of "weightage" as an indicator for re-delineation, in practice, the state and the federal government have used the "weightage" factor in the re-delineation exercise to their advantage. However, the "weightage" factor is only applied to certain areas, and in some cases, it is not used.

There are several basic criteria used by the EC to achieve consistency in terms of the number of voters in all constituencies and to reduce the tendency to depend on the "weightage" factor in determining the number of voters for rural areas (Election Commission 1996, pp.6-7). The electoral boundaries are divided into five categories: (1) cities, which include cosmopolitan areas with high population density and smaller electoral boundaries between 11 and 26 square kilometres, with the number of voters fixed between 60,000 and 69,000 for parliamentary elections and 25,000 to 35,000 for state elections; (2) big towns; the population density of this category is less than that of the cities and covers an area of 27 to 49 square kilometres. The number of voters for this category is between 50,000 and 59,000 for parliamentary and 20,000 to 25,000 for state elections (Election Commission

1996, p.23): (3) small town/semi-urban, which covers an area of between 50 and 90 square kilometres, and the number of voters is fixed at around 40,000 to 49,000 for parliamentary and 15,000 to 20,000 for state elections: (4) semi-rural districts, which comprise developed agricultural areas which have their own local administration. These areas cover between 100 and 250 square kilometres and the number of voters for parliamentary elections are between 30,000 and 35,000 and between 10,000 and 15,000 for state elections and (5) rural areas, which are also labelled "depressed areas" [by the EC] because they lack transportation or communication facilities. Such areas cover more than 250 square kilometres, and the number of voters is somewhere between 20,000 and 29,000 for parliamentary elections and between 7,000 and 10,000 voters for state elections (Election Commission 1996, pp.24-25; Lim 2002, pp.120-122).

As mentioned earlier, these re-delineations produce problems, especially with regard to the use of "weightage" in determining the number of voters, especially in the rural areas. The 1962 and 1973 constitutional amendments, which transferred power to allocate parliamentary constituencies among the various states from the EC to the ruling coalition, as well as the complete removal of limits on rural "weightage" further led to the misuse of the re-delineation of electoral boundaries by the ruling party (Lim 2002, p.109). Although the number of constituencies and their apportionment were specified in the Constitution (article 46), it can be amended at any time (although the Constitution stated eight years but it can be amended when needed) by the ruling party with its two-thirds majority in Parliament. In addition to that, the re-delineation process also weakened public confidence in the EC as an independent body, not subject to 'the whims of parliament' (Lim 2002, p.109). This is illustrated by Groves, as follows:

'It is apparent that the new amendments as to elections converted a formerly independent Election Commission, whose decisions became law and whose members enjoyed permanent tenure, into an advisory body of men of no certain tenure whose terms of office, except for the remuneration, are subject to the whims of parliament. The vital power of determining the size of constituencies as well as their boundaries is now taken from a Commission, which the constitution-makers had apparently wished, by tenure and status, by giving this power to a transient majority of parliament, whose temptations to gerrymander districts and manipulate the varying numerical possibilities between "rural" and "urban" constituencies for political advantage is manifest' (in Lim 2002, pp.109-110).

By removing the limit on rural weightage, it further tilts the balance of the number of voters in the electoral constituencies towards the ruling party, at the expense of the non-Muslim Bumiputera. This is because most of the voters in the rural constituencies are Bumiputera, and live in poverty, making it easier for the ruling party to manage their votes. In addition to that, the re-delineation exercises have resulted in the reduction in the number of Iban representatives in the state assembly from 21 in 1979 to 17 in 1996.

Although this number has not changed since 1996, there was a minor change introduced in 2001, with the 2001 re-drawing of the electoral boundaries which increased the number of state seats from 62 to 71. One case in point is the re-drawing of the Dudong constituency, which resulted in further division of the seat into four more constituencies [apart from Dudong (Sibu town)], namely Bukit Assek, Bawang Assan, Tamin and Kakus, which resulted in further reduction of Iban majority seats. Dudong was originally

an Iban majority seat, and in the last two state elections (1991 and 1996) it was under PBDS, but the division of Dudong into five electoral units meant that Dudong, Bukit Assek and Bawang Assan were allocated to Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), while Tamin and Kakus were assigned to PBDS. These changes not only reduced Iban political strength but also divided the Iban voters. The delineation of the Dudong constituency is an example of how the ruling party has manipulated the re-delineation exercises to its advantage, and in this case, the allocation of more seats to its political ally, SUPP. Bukit Assek and Bawang Assan were Iban majority seats before the re-delineation exercise of 1995 took place, but after a minor change in 2001, both constituencies became Chinese majority seats, including Dudong (Sibu town). The re-delineation of electoral boundaries along ethnic lines has not only divided the Dayaks but also the Iban. Datuk Linggi Jugah, the PBB's former Secretary-General, argues that the electoral boundaries are divided ethnically to benefit other ethnic groups, particularly the Muslim Bumiputera.

In addition, the re-delineation of electoral boundaries is used as a legitimate political tool to paralyse or weaken the opposition camp. For example, the re-delineation of Tasik Biru constituency, a stronghold of the Bidayuh-based State Reform Party (STAR) led by Dr. Patau Rubis, weakened the party by dividing the Bidayuh voters. Moreover, Dr Patau Rubis was forced to withdraw his nomination which consequently resulted in the victory of BN's candidate Peter Nansian Ngusie who was contesting on SNAP's ticket. Although STAR did not contest in the 1996 election, the re-delineation exercise had weakened the party in the 2001 state election. For example, STAR only managed to garner 2.27 percent (or 12, 211 votes) of the total votes in the 2001 election and failed to win any seat. Lim Hong Ai (2002) argues that constituency delineation has two important aspects: the distribution of voters among constituencies and the determination of constituency boundaries. Lim also argues that 'both of these aspects can be exploited for partisan political advantage. Delineating constituencies of

unequal electoral sizes would favour the party whose supporters are located in the smaller constituencies' (Loh 2003, p.26). The re-delineation of Dudong and the creation of Satok seats are examples of such tactics.

As a result of the Dudong re-delineation exercise, a situation arose in which the constituency boundaries overlapped, and this led to a tussle between two of the BN component parties, SUPP and PBDS. For example, Dudong and Tamin have been sharing an area which is about three square miles in radius for the last eight years. The area is between miles 13 and 16 and the voters from these areas are divided into two camps, the Dudong electorate who support SUPP and the Tamin voters who support PBDS. Therefore, at every election, one could observe the struggle between these two parties in attempting to entice voters to shift their political allegiances. It is also important to point out that the voters in this area are ethnically mixed, comprising both Iban and Chinese. Hence, the PBDS launched its campaign in the areas where the Iban are concentrated, while the SUPP launched its campaign among the Chinese voters. As long as each party does not cross their "agreed" boundaries, everything remains fine. This is not a clearly demarcated boundary but a situation that has arisen as a result of inter-party competition, especially between the Dayak and the Chinese parties in the Third Division, which is related to the expansion of Sibu town. More land is needed to develop the town and there is an increasing Chinese demand for more Iban land from the rural areas.

However, in the 2001 state election, SUPP went further by campaigning in the Iban longhouses at Mile 13 (under Tamin), managing to attract the voters from these longhouses to shift their allegiance from PBDS to SUPP. This resulted in complaints from the PBDS leaders in the Tamin and Selangau areas and this is an example of how the re-delineation of electoral boundaries can affect not only Iban political solidarity but also relationship between the BN component parties.

Furthermore, the 1984 Constitutional amendments have further enabled the ruling party, especially United Malay National Organization (UMNO) and its allies, to manipulate and delineate the electoral boundaries much more easily by just changing the number of parliamentary and state seats. These changes include: (1) the reduction of the constraints over the apportionment and delineation of electoral constituencies; (2) the authority of the ruling party to apportion parliamentary seats among the various states; (3) the removal of clear limits to rural weightage; (4) the granting of authority to the Prime Minister to amend at will the Commission's recommendations before submitting them for approval by a single majority in parliament; and (5) the lifting of the eight-year requirement for the general review of constituencies so that it can be done whenever the changes in the number of legislative seats are made (Electoral commission 1996). With regard to the re-delineation of electoral boundaries, the Prime Minister has not taken advantage of these changes so far to change the electoral boundaries at will, because it would give the opposition an opportunity to criticize existing government policies as well as risk losing public confidence in the EC and jeopardize the democratic process which Malaysia claims to uphold. Nevertheless, the re-delineation of electoral boundaries in Sarawak does contribute to factionalism in Iban politics and its effect is also evident in the reduction of Iban representatives and the status of their political parties in the Sarawak government.

The Party System in Malaysia

Factionalism within UMNO was very apparent in the early 1990s, especially between the old guards, originally led by the late Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the ambitious and fundamentalist Malays, led by Mahathir. These struggles led to the de-registration of UMNO by the Registrar of Societies (ROS). Nonetheless, Mahathir managed to re-register UMNO, and rename it UMNO

baru (new). Factionalism in UMNO will more than likely influence the other BN component parties, such as the Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA), PBB, SUPP, SNAP and PBDS, since the Sarawak grand Alliance party system is modelled on the federal coalition party system. Both systems incorporate communal-based parties under one political umbrella known as the BN with one dominant partner, UMNO, at the federal level and PBB at the state level. On the outside, it looks as though all the component parties enjoy the same privileges and are on equal terms. But in reality, it is a coalition of political parties on unequal terms with one dominant partner. This scenario is congruent with Kothani's argument that in a political system of one-party dominance, the pressure is brought on the dominant party by opposition parties and by pressure groups, political notables, and factions of the dominant party (Belloni & Beller 1978). He further suggests that:

'...factionalism is functional to a dominant party's maintenance of its dominance...[and] factional politics produces more competition in a dominant-party political system than there would be if the dominant party had no internal factions....[thus] intraparty factions in a dominant party may contribute to its continued dominance' (Belloni & Beller 1978, pp.9-13).

Here, other political parties form the pressure groups within the Alliance or factions within UMNO or PBB itself, since the powers of the opposition parties in Malaysia have been significantly repressed. Competition will occur between the component parties within the BN with UMNO acting as the mediator and the ultimate decision-maker. King (1990, p.126) also observes that '...the Sarawak party's position depends on its membership of the UMNO-dominated BN government'. The Malays, who account for approximately 53 percent of the total population in Malaysia and whose interests were and are accorded in the Constitution,

automatically lead the coalition, thus playing the dominant role and setting the rules of the coalition while claiming to protect the interests of its component members (Lim 2002, p.102).

This type of party system is considered the best way to accommodate the needs of different ethnic groups, in order to avoid ethnic conflicts. However, it can also be suggested that it is a better way to control various ethnic groups while satisfying their needs, without compromising the dominant member's position in the political sense, especially in a country where ethnic diversity is so prominent. There has been an increased centralisation of power in the hands of the Malay party – UMNO, 'following the unsuccessful challenge to its dominant position by the MCA in the so-called 1959 UMNO-MCA crisis and within UMNO itself as a result of the 1960 party constitution and subsequent amendments' (Loh 1997, p.21).

Loh further argues that as a result of increased centralisation, it has become imperative for the state government to have the approval from the dominant member of the Alliance, UMNO, when selecting the Chief Minister and the number of state executive councils in Alliance-controlled states after the 1964 election (Loh 1997, p.22). This was clearly apparent in 1966 in Sarawak with the removal of Stephen Kalong Ningkan as the Chief Minister and the appointment of Tawi Sli as his successor and the federal decision to appoint Tun Abdul Rahman as the Chief Minister after Tawi Sli (Leigh 1974). Thus, the endorsement from UMNO in the appointment of the Chief Minister in the states controlled by the Alliance, as well as the decision in determining which parties should and should not be members of the grand Alliance, have become a necessity in the political game to control who should be in power and for how long. For instance, PBDS, after the 1987 elections, remained in the Alliance at the federal level, even though it was in the opposition camp at the state level. In fact, it has been suggested that the inclusion of PBDS in the state coalition government in 1994, despite a three-year wait before Taib Mahmud made the

decision to include PBDS in his government, was the work of UMNO. Leigh describes politics in Sarawak as follows:

‘...federal links have been critical to the establishment and continuance of the Alliance pattern in Sarawak, that is, the larger system has sought to determine the direction of the development of the sub-system’ (Leigh 1974, p.161).

In Sarawak, the state government under the Malay-Melanau political elite has benefited considerably from this system, especially under the Tun Abdul Rahman and Taib Mahmud administrations. However, when Taib Mahmud opted for the politics of accommodation, coming up with his Barisan Plus formula, whereby both SNAP and PBDS were included in the ruling coalition in 1983, one might question the sincerity behind his claim to “include” the Dayak in his government (Jitab & Ritchie 1991, pp.15-16).

Was the Barisan Plus government really a noble attempt on Taib Mahmud’s part to include the neglected Dayaks in his administration? What was the real reason behind this formula? Bearing these questions in mind, let us briefly examine the political situation which preceded the formulation of the Barisan Plus government by Taib Mahmud. The leadership crisis within SNAP, which was a result of Dunstan Endawie’s resignation as the party president in July 1980, resulted in James Wong’s accession (Mason 1995, p.28). The crisis worsened when Wong won the presidential seat, resulting in the formation of PBDS in 1983 to represent the disgruntled Dayak group within SNAP. With the state election imminent, the 1983 election was Taib Mahmud’s first test in determining his continuance in power. He realised that he could not afford to have any political parties outside of his political control, especially in the 1983 election in which PBDS had managed to command the majority support of the Dayak voters. The best way to control the disgruntled majority was to keep them within his

power – within the BN. This would enable him to keep the Dayaks in a subservient position. In the words of Dunstan Endawie (February 2002), 'it is much easier for the government to divide and rule the Dayak politically through its legitimate party system'.

In the 1983 state election, SNAP and PBDS contested against each other in the constituencies which were formally held by SNAP. While SNAP contested in all 18 constituencies, PBDS was contesting in 14 seats which the Dayaks constituted the majority. PBB and SUPP, on the other hand, took advantage of the rivalry between the two Dayak-based parties by fielding "independent" candidates in the constituencies contested by SNAP and PBDS (Endawie February 2002, p.32). As a result, despite winning 15 out of 18 seats, SNAP (with eight seats) and PBDS (with seven seats) lost three of their Dayak seats to SUPP-backed independent candidates, thus further reducing the Iban political strength. Thus, SUPP benefited the most politically from this situation, at the expense of the Iban and the Dayaks, who were divided between two major competing parties. However, at the writing of this chapter, the Dayaks are further divided between six major parties, comprising Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP), SNAP, PBB, SUPP, DAP and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) (currently, DAP, PKR and SNAP are the three major opposition parties in Sarawak).

Poverty and Lack of Educational Attainment

Jayum (1991b, p.156) suggests that, according to the Mid-Term Review of the Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981-1985), about 48.7 percent of the Iban, 65 percent of the Bidayuh and 18 percent of the Orang Ulu lived below the poverty line in the first half of the 1980s. These figures were recorded at a time when the national poverty rate had dropped to as low as 38 percent for rural areas in 1982. The high incidence of poverty recorded for the Dayaks can be attributed to the fact that they were, and still happen to be mainly a rural population whose livelihoods depend very much

on seasonal agricultural activities. For example, in 1989, of the 98 percent of poor households in rural Sarawak, Iban households constituted 46 percent (Jayum 1994, p.32). Since poverty was, and still is, largely confined to rural areas and since most indigenous communities, most of whom are Iban, are rural dwellers, it is safe to assume that poverty among the Iban is widespread, despite the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) from 1970 to 1990. I would like to highlight the fact that the poverty figures above relate to the late 1980s. This is due to the fact that up-to-date poverty figures by ethnicity are not readily accessible. It is evident that the NEP did not extend to the Iban as it did increasingly to the Malays (Jayum 1994, pp.32-36). Masing noted that the poverty factor continues to play a crucial role in perpetuating factionalism in Iban politics:

'The Iban are basically not well off. So, it is easier to divide people who are not well off by using money...and so, if you join me, this is what you are getting' (Masing 20 April 2002).

Hence, the poverty factor plays a significant role in perpetuating factionalism in Iban politics, and provides an explanation as to why the Iban are easily "bought" during elections, which further splits the Iban vote. Jayum (May 2004) also further argues that because the majority of Iban politicians are poor politicians when they do get power, they will first enrich themselves and their family and local community before helping other "Iban fellows".

This factor combined with their egalitarian nature has enabled others to divide them further. Jayum (May 2004) also says that in Iban society, one has to prove one's worth before any Iban extends his help to another Iban, especially those who are not immediate family. This is in contrast to the Chinese, who according to Jayum (May 2004), join politics for charitable reasons, to help their fellow Chinese and use politics as a tool to extend their

business interests. For example, Moggie who had been a Federal Minister for 20 years did not utilise his position and office to help his constituents, let alone the Iban as a whole. Instead, he used it to enrich himself and his clients, who were in return, only interested in enriching themselves and their relatives. Had Moggie used his position and office as Federal Minister to help the Iban, many would not find themselves in the predicament they are facing now. This is because a Federal Minister is in a better position compared to that of a state assemblyman in terms of allocating development funds. A Federal Minister has the authority to dispose several millions worth of development funds to the state every year. A state assemblyman, however, will have to face Taib Mahmud, who is known to favour the Malay-Melanau in terms of economic development.

Lack of education, or a lower level of educational attainment among the Iban, also contributed to factionalism in politics. In 1980, the number of Iban who had a university education was 177, or 3 percent of all university degree holders in Sarawak (Jayum 1991, p.157). The statement below supports this fact:

'Because our education standard is not that high, and [the] majority of the Iban are still low in education, it is slightly [sic] easier for you to bring them around to your thinking' (Masing 20 April 2002).

Furthermore, Iban leaders have argued that rural voters' lower standard of living and lack of education have resulted in their low expectation of their leaders (Entulu 2001 & 2002) compared to their urban counterparts whose living and educational standards are better. This factor is closely related to the government's POD or patronage policies, which has been responsible in further dividing Iban voters in the rural constituencies.

Closely related to Iban low educational attainment is their lack of entrepreneurial skills. Jayum (May 2004) states that due to

Iban politicians' lack of entrepreneurial skills, it is important for them to seek another ally whom they can "manipulate" to work for them or with them, in handling the business concessions obtained from their patron, Taib Mahmud. He further argues that the Iban always depend on Chinese businessmen. The classic example was during Ningkan's administration when he depended on the Chinese for his political survival. His Land Bill of 1965 was allegedly a "pay-off" to the Chinese for their help (Jayum May 2004). Dunstan Endawie and Leo Moggie also relied on James Wong and later Sng Chee Hua to ensure their political survival.

Personal Loyalty

With regard to the Malays whose structured leadership has been well established for a long time, it is easier to unite a community when leaders at the top can enforce sanctions against others. In this regard, Daniel Tajem suggests that an Iban politician 'can only follow or take orders but not ask or question the authority' (Tajem 2001 & 2002). This is illustrated by the statement made by Joseph Entulu Belaun, a state assemblyman for Tamin:

'The state government led by PBB formulates the policies and pass[es] these policies to their constituents. This is our administrative policy and we, in the PBDS, fully support him [Taib Mahmud] and his policies and I think it is for our own good' (Entulu 2001 & 2002).

However, according to Daniel Tajem, this loyalty towards an authority figure took a long time to develop. It took the Brooke Rajahs half a century to secure Iban loyalty, which they achieved through harsh measures, such as "pacifying" those who rebelled against them. During an interview, Daniel Tajem (2002) suggested that ultimately the Iban had been taught to follow orders by the Brooke Rajahs, without question. For instance, the role of councillors during

the Brooke period was to receive the commands or instructions from the top and pass them down to their constituents. Thus, the idea that the people at the top must be obeyed has influenced Dayak political thinking. One might then ask how we can rationalize Iban support for other political parties led by other ethnic groups. Daniel Tajem attributes this phenomenon to the present government practice of appointing Iban leaders, rather than allowing the Iban to choose their leaders. Unlike the position of *tuai rumah*, whereby the leader is chosen by the people and known to the people under his leadership, the *wakil rakyat* or the member of parliaments (MPs) or state assemblymen are chosen for them by the government.

However, I would disagree with Tajem's suggestion that the Iban are a dominated people who are very loyal to figures of authority and can only follow orders. If the Iban are loyal to an authority figure, how can he explain the fact that the Iban belong to other parties? I believe that patronage politics, between the newly-elected politicians and the politically and financially well-established patrons or political leaders, such as those from UMNO or PBB, can explain the loyalty of Iban leaders' towards these authority figures. In order to stay in the game, these new leaders have to seek or form an alliance with powerful political patrons.

Tajem also suggests that in order to unite the Iban, the government practice of appointing Iban leaders need to be changed. However, in my view, it will be impossible to change this practice under the current leadership as long as it provides those in power with a convenient opportunity to eliminate or neutralise Iban leaders whose opinions are not consistent with the BN government's principles or objectives. Moreover, as soon as these "elected" Iban leaders come to power, they start to recruit their own followers in order to strengthen their political position, and they continue to build on their network of supporters in order to stay in power, especially if they plan to win subsequent elections.

Jayum (1994, pp.79-81), however, suggests that the Iban did have some political experience prior to James Brooke's arrival and that they did possess political institutions, even though they were not institutionalized in Western political terms. Jayum characterized the loose Iban form of political institutions as "Iban regional leadership" (in the form of *tuai kayau*). He argues that the arrival of James Brooke simply reinforced the existing regional leadership into a more stable political institution. Nonetheless, the authority of the *tuai kayau* prior to Brooke rule did not extend beyond his region. At the same time, the Iban leaders played relatively limited and insignificant roles compared to their aristocratic Malay counterparts. I am inclined to agree with Jayum on these points, in that their loose form of political institution and regional leadership influenced Iban provincial or regional thinking, their approach toward politics, and their tendency to follow a leader who is not only capable of leading them, but can also prove himself to be a person of great worth in the community. In fact, the Iban are more skeptical about their own leaders.

The "politics of individuality" (Tajem 2002) where personal interests take precedence over the Iban party leaders, preoccupied with their own interests, has also resulted in the Iban community losing respect towards them. With regard to the Iban leaders' involvement in business, which is again related to the "politics of individuality", Daniel Tajem argued that:

The Iban are the people who cannot help themselves unless being helped and they will need guidance. Unfortunately, the politicians' involvement in business has neglected these people. Their involvement in business has clouded their judgments and resulted in their failure to make wise judgments concerning the Dayak community as a whole' (Tajem 2002).

Apart from the factors mentioned above, the influence of the "old attitudes" (which stress Ibans' identity and nationalism)

of the older Iban generation are still extant and these attitudes argued by second generation Iban leaders such as James Masing, Joseph Entulu and William Mawan, continue to divide the Iban. These ideological beliefs are against the multiracial principles which Masing and his followers pursue. The multiracial principles mean that the Iban will have to co-operate and to accommodate other ethnic groups, if they are to take an active role in their own future development. However, Tajem and Moggie refuse to accede to Masing's demands. Differences in opinion of Iban leaders regarding party principles have hindered unity at the grassroots level. If the leaders at the top fail to agree on these issues, how can one expect ordinary people to unite?

The Chinese Factor— Iban and Chinese Relations

The first Iban-Chinese face-to-face encounters were through barter trade, which goes back a long way, even before the arrival of James Brooke, when an Iban "pioneer raider", Unggang (*lebor menoa*) is said to have granted permission to Chinese traders from Kuching to trade along the river (Sandin 1967, p.64). These Chinese traders were asked to fly a white flag on the masts of their boats. The Iban paid for the goods with paddy. The relationship between the Chinese and the Iban was more accommodating than that of the Chinese and the Malay, who were rivals in trade (Chew 1990, p.134). It was crucial for the rural Chinese traders to accommodate their Iban and other native clients, for the sake of their livelihood. In addition, this accommodation depended on adapting to native ways, learning their customs and even speaking their languages (Chew 1990, pp.134-135).

Intermarriage between Chinese traders and Iban women also occurred before the arrival of James Brooke. Thus, it is of no surprise to find that almost all Chinese politicians speak Iban, Kayan, or other local languages fluently, not only because of their close relationship, but also because any Chinese who wants to contest in an Iban rural constituency has to learn to speak the language of the

voters. They have also realised that they can tip the political balance, especially between the Malay-Melanau and the Dayak voters, and play the role of power-broker to their advantage.

The Malay and Iban have come to realise the importance of having Chinese support on their side. For instance, in 1969, PESAKA led by Tawi Sli tried to form an alliance with SUPP and SNAP in its attempt to take over the state leadership before Tun Abdul Rahman undermined their efforts by offering SUPP the allocation of important ministerial portfolios. It has to be borne in mind that the alliance between the two was enough to undermine the ability of other parties to take over power in Sarawak, with PBB and SUPP winning 12 seats each while PESAKA won 8 seats. Nonetheless, even without PESAKA, the Alliance which comprised SUPP and PBB would have been able to form a government (Chin 1996, pp.117-126).

The collaboration between the Chinese party (SUPP), the Iban and Chinese-led party, (SNAP) and the Malay-Melanau party (PBB), once again proved to be vital at least to PBB, in 1987, when the Kumpulan Maju, which constituted PERMAS, led by Tun Abdul Rahman and PBDS, cast a vote of no confidence against Taib Mahmud. The collaboration between SUPP and PBB has continued until today, and this political collaboration was formalised with the marriage of Taib Mahmud's son, Sulaiman Taib and George Chan's daughter, Aisyah Abdullah.

Despite long-established Chinese-Iban relationships, the Chinese role as a divisive factor in Iban politics is very evident in breaking SNAP into two parties with the formation of PBDS in August 1983. As a result of that division, the leadership of SNAP was transferred to the Chinese, led by James Wong from 1981 until 2003 (The Malaysian Today 10 July 2003, p.3). As I mentioned earlier, the Chinese also utilise their ability to speak the Iban language and their knowledge of Iban *adat*, to their political advantage. For example, Dr. Soon Choon Teck, an assemblyman

for Dudong (Sibu Town) used his knowledge of the Iban language to win Iban support even after they had voted for the opposition in the 1999 parliamentary election. Similarly, Datuk Sng Chee Hua and his son Larry Sng, the former assemblyman for Pelagus (another rural constituency), had also utilised the Iban language and local knowledge to win the Pelagus seat in the 2001 state elections. It was suggested that Sng Chee Hua and his son had spent lavishly on entertaining their rural constituents in their effort to get them to vote for Larry Sng, who was unknown to the people in the constituency. Despite their knowledge of Iban *adat*, and language this was not the main reason for their success. Money or patronage (Entulu 2001), at the end of the day, remains the most powerful political tool in determining the success or failure of any politician.

The same factor of Chinese patronage, which had guaranteed PBDS success in the 2001 state election, also contributed to factionalism in the Iban party in 2002. PBDS was divided into two factions, with one supporting Masing and Sng, while the other supported Tajem. The party split because of Masing's insistence that Sng should be made its Deputy-President. Tajem's refusal to accept Masing's terms accelerated the unresolved crisis between the two Iban leaders which had its origins in the party's Triennial Delegates' Conference that took place in 2000. By July 2003, the split worsened when Tajem took over the party leadership, while Masing continued to fight for his cause to make PBDS a multiracial party outside the party framework. Masing on the other hand, had no choice but to push for Sng because he was one of the party's financial backers.

In addition, it has been suggested that most of Masing's followers are in Sng's pocket. Masing's accommodating policy is not in keeping with Tajem's pro-Iban policy. Masing believes that the Iban have to be more accommodating if they want to advance politically and economically along with other ethnic groups. Tajem, however, believes that since PBDS is an Iban-based party, the Iban

should lead the party. Datuk Linggi Jugah also argues that the Chinese can only bring damage to the party and divide the Iban through money politics. In fact, Daniel Ngieng of SUPP said:

'The Iban support is very cheap and they will support any candidates in exchange for money. They are easily bought and impressed' (Ngieng September 2001).

I will now turn my discussion to SNAP and the role played by James Wong and his Chinese counterparts in reducing the once-strong Iban party to an organisation for him and his followers to pursue their personal interests. When Dunstan Endawie was the President of SNAP, James Wong was its Deputy-President. Upon Dunstan Endawie's resignation, James Wong automatically became its President until the new party election could take place. James Wong defeated Moggie and his followers in the party's election in 1983 and, as a result, Moggie and his followers left the party to form a new exclusive Iban and wider Dayak party – the PBDS. James Wong was alleged to have used money to buy votes, although he denied it and said that he won on his own merit (New Reality 1999).

Another internal struggle within SNAP occurred in April 2002, when James Wong decided to appoint his supporters to the Supreme Council Committee without consulting the senior members of the party. This conflict accelerated further when Wong sacked Bintulu assemblyman Datuk Tiong King Siong for alleged breached of party constitution. As a result, a faction led by Mawan walked out of the party's executive general meeting as a sign of protest. Wong's refusal to resign as the President and to give way to a new generation of Iban leaders finally split the party into two and resulted in the de-registration of SNAP. Mawan and his followers formed a new Dayak-based party in November 2002 – the SPDP.

As expected, SPDP was invited to join the BN coalition. This split further reinforced the status quo of PBB as the backbone of the Sarawak BN. Although, SNAP made a comeback with James Wong stepping down and the election of an Iban, Edwin Dundang (The Malaysian Today 10 July 2003, p.3) as the new President, in my view this will not play any significant role in increasing Iban political solidarity. On the contrary, although SNAP managed to make a comeback, it has no seat in the state legislative assembly, since most of its assemblymen had left the party to form SPDP. Instead of consolidating their support behind one party, the Iban, now have six or possibly seven parties, (PBB, SPDP, PRS, SUPP, PKR, SNAP, DAP, Parti Cinta Malaysia (PCM)) fighting for the limited state and parliamentary seats.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of factionalism normally centres on the problems of gaining and maintaining power. Factionalism is usually viewed as 'a malady of the political order because it is divisive and because it is irrational in that it tends to cloud the clear presentation of political choices' (Kothani in Belloni & Beller 1978, p.161). However, factionalism is not necessarily a negative force and process in the political order because it produces positive outcomes for some at the expense of others. Kothani (in Belloni & Beller 1978, p.161) argues that factionalism produces more competition in a dominant-party's political system, and works towards maintaining a dominant party's position. Hence, one could conclude that while factional politics maintain the dominance of one particular party, it can also further divide or undermine the solidarity of other parties. Therefore, to suggest that factionalism is dysfunctional may not be entirely correct for it can both strengthen and weaken political parties at the same time.

Moreover, Zariski (1960) argues that a loosely-structured party tends to contain more factions than a better disciplined one. He further contends that factions in loosely-structured parties tend

to be more like cliques, or factions based on affinity, which means factions formed by groups of people who share similar goals or cultural values. This is particularly true in the case of Iban political parties which are less disciplined than PBB and UMNO, and thus tend to be prone to factionalism. Furthermore, the basis for forming factions is none other than to pursue the factions' instrumental and sometimes ideological goals, usually to gain control of party leadership and resources which the party possesses or to which it can gain access.

As we have seen, there are several contributing factors which help to foster factionalism in Iban politics. Among them are regional differences and scattered rural population; lack of formal leadership and higher level political institutions; lack of educational attainment; provincial or parochial thinking; Iban egalitarianism, individualism and "belligerence", or their confrontational approach; the government's policies such as the POD and the re-delineation of electoral boundaries; the control of resources by wealthy Chinese entrepreneurs; and finally the Malaysian electoral system itself.

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(Endnotes)

¹ The total membership of the Sarawak National Alliance is claimed to be about 100,000. It is important to point out the difference between the Sarawak National Alliance (PESAKA and SNAP) and the Sarawak Alliance. The Sarawak Alliance was originally known as the Sarawak United Front, which comprised five political parties – Barisan Rakyat Jati Sarawak (BARJASA), Sarawak Chinese Association (SCA), PESAKA, SNAP and Party Negara (PANAS). The Sarawak National Alliance, which was based on the Alliance party format in Malaya came into being on 29 November 1962.

² Constitutionally, PESAKA was supposed to get the first Chief Minister of Sarawak's seat because it had more members in the state legislative assembly. But PESAKA gave way so that Ningkan and his party, SNAP, could lead Sarawak's first government.

³ The term "Sea Dayak" was used to describe the Iban in the early nineteenth century. Now the term "Iban" is widely used.

⁴ The word "pacification" referred to Brooke policy to eliminate Iban headhunting and piracy. The Brookes believed that Iban "piracy" was the result of Malay influence and therefore, in order to control the Ibans, they would first need to control the Malays (Pringle, 1970, p.209).

⁵ The term "pirates" was used by James Brooke to describe the Dayak who rebelled against him (Pringle 1970, p.209).

⁶ Pringle (1970, p.209) lists a number of Iban leaders originating from Saribas: Sarawak's First Chief Minister, Stephen Kalong Ningkan, the first Sarawak-born state secretary, Gerunsin Lembat, the first local Curator of the Sarawak Museum, Benedict Sandin, and the first Iban Resident, Datuk Peter Tinggom.

⁷ This is a common practice in the Third Division, especially in Oya and Kanowit districts.

⁸ The institution of *penghulu* was created during the reign of the Second Rajah, Charles Brooke. However, the titles Dato Patinggi, Dato Bandar and Lela Wangsa, which were introduced by the Brunei Sultanate, were revived by James Brooke in one of his early attempts to influence politics in the Second Division.

⁹ These political figures are Jabu anak Numpang, one of the Deputy Chief Ministers and the Minister of Rural Development, James Masing, Douglas Ugah and Celestine Ujang.

¹⁰ This opinion is also shared by Datuk Daniel Tajem, PBDS's Deputy President and Supreme Council member.

¹¹ BN3 is composed of PBB, SNAP and SUPP.

¹² Lijhpart terms this type of political arrangement "consociational democracy". It has four main features: first, a grand coalition of various ethnic groups which represent their respective communities; second, mutual veto or concurrent majority to protect vital minority interests; third, upholding of the principle of proportionality with regard to political representation and division of spoils, and fourth, a high degree of autonomy for each ethnic group in running its own internal affairs (Lijhpart in Jayum 1991, p.3)

¹³ A clique is a coalition whose members associate regularly with each other on the basis of affection and common interest and possess a marked sense of common identity. All members of a clique interact with one another, though there may be core members, primary members, and secondary members. A coalition here refers to a temporary alliance of distinct parties for a limited purpose.